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RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 9182
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9286
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0579
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2476
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 9883
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1674
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 0963
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4077
RHMFIA/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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RHMFIA/HQ USSOCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 001297

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: NAXALITES KILL 55 IN ATTACK ON SECURITY FORCES IN CHHATTISGARH

REF: A. MUMBAI 351
[B.](#) MUMBAI 358
[C.](#) MUMBAI 906
[D.](#) MUMBAI 1119
[E.](#) MUMBAI 1253
[F.](#) MUMBAI 1265
[G.](#) MUMBAI 1317

Classified By: Political Counselor Ted Osius for reasons 1.4 (B,D)

[11.](#) (C) Summary. Hundreds of Naxalite insurgents stormed a heavily-fortified security post in the Dantewada district of southern Chhattisgarh during a pre-dawn raid on March 15. After three hours of fighting, 55 security and police personnel were killed. This unfortunate and gruesome attack could wake up the rest of the nation to the plight of Chhattisgarh, which is fighting an insurgency that it does not seem able to suppress on its own. End Summary.

Bloody, Surprise Attack

[12.](#) (U) Naxalite (a.k.a. Maoist) insurgents--numbering between 300 and 400--stormed a heavily-fortified security post in the Dantewada district of southern Chhattisgarh during a pre-dawn raid on March 15. They surrounded the forest-encircled camp and launched a highly co-ordinated, surprise attack around 2:00 a.m. using guns, home-made petrol bombs, and hand grenades. The rebels overran the 75-strong force in a three-hour battle. By the time of their withdrawal, the Naxalite insurgents killed 55 people, 16 of

whom were Chhattisgarh Armed Forces personnel and the remaining 39 were "Special Police Officers"--members of the Chhattisgarh government-sponsored "Salwa Judum" anti-Naxalite civil militia. The rebels escaped into the neighboring jungle with a cache of arms and explosives, and left behind landmines that hindered early efforts to reach the post. There have been no reports of rebel casualties. This attack is being reported as one of the worst in the decades-long Naxalite insurgency.

Worst Yet Ahead?

¶3. (U) In reaction to the gruesome attack, Ajai Sahni, Executive Director at the New Delhi-based Institute for Conflict Management, was quoted in the press as warning, "This (latest) period has been a period of planning and of consolidation, and you will now see the consequences... You can expect a fairly abrupt escalation of violence over the coming weeks and months." Thousands of policemen are currently combing the area of the attack to apprehend those responsible, but are reportedly reluctant to enter the forest out of fears of additional attacks. "We can't go blindly into the forests," one commander was quoted in the media.

Part of a Decades-Long, Vicious Rebellion

¶4. (C) The Maoist-inspired Naxalite movement started in the late-1960s in West Bengal, and came to Chhattisgarh in 1984. In June 2006, there were an estimated 3,000-4,500 Naxalite

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fighters, who typically disaggregate into camps of about 30 to 40 fighters. The Naxalite rebels are reported to have a strong presence in eight of Chhattisgarh's 16 districts. Geographically, the insurgency is concentrated in the northern and southern regions of Chhattisgarh, which are densely forested and rank among the least developed and poorest regions of India. The attack took place in the southern district of Dantewada, which is a known stronghold of the Naxalite rebellion.

¶5. (C) Around 6,000 Indians are believed to have died since the Naxalite uprising began several decades ago. In Chhattisgarh alone, 316 civilians, 88 Naxalites, and 147 security personnel have been killed in Naxalite attacks since January 1, 2006. In addition, escalating violence displaced more than 60,000 individuals in 2006. One of Chhattisgarh's 27 camps for internally-displaced persons fell victim to a Naxalite attack in July 2006, resulting in 32 deaths in the Dantewada district. Five security personnel were killed in a landmine explosion earlier in March 2007--also in the Dantewada district.

Groping for a Solution

¶6. (C) In an effort to stem the increasing levels of violence, and largely deprived of forces and/or meaningful assistance from the Indian Armed Services, the government of Chhattisgarh has tried several methods to combat the Naxalites. Since June 2005, the government has funded and trained the "Salwa Judum" anti-Naxalite forces, a civil militia billed as a spontaneous uprising of the villagers against the Naxalites. Numbering about 5,000 in June 2006, the existence and involvement of this militia has been partly blamed for the spiraling level of violence since Naxalites now target those populations whom they perceive as helping or collaborating with either the state police or the "Salwa Judum." Nor is it clear that the "Salwa Judum" is having a positive impact on Chhattisgarh's efforts versus the Naxalites. The government of Chhattisgarh also brought on K.P.S. Gill, former Chief of Punjab Police, as a special adviser in 2006 to help lead the fight against the insurgency. He is credited with the successful conclusion of

the Sikh insurgency in Punjab in the mid-1990s. In addition, the Chhattisgarh police force was doubled in 2006 to 16,000-strong.

Attack Could Remind Delhi of Chhattisgarh's Plight

17. (C) Comment: If Ajai Sahni's comments are true, India should brace itself for yet more terrible news from this highly troubled corner of Chhattisgarh, a young and struggling state. This attack attracted heavy media attention, with both The Hindu and The Times of India reporting this attack as leading stories--the headlines were "Naxalites massacre policemen in Chhattisgarh" and "Red terror strikes again," respectively. Post reporting on the Naxalite troubles in Chhattisgarh paints a decaying security situation over the past year, and--most worrisome--an ambivalence at the Center about the plight of Chhattisgarh. In March 2006, however, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh did say

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that Maoist (a.k.a. Naxalite) groups pose the greatest threat to India's internal stability and democratic culture. This latest attack could be a catalyst for the Center to match rhetoric with deeds and take a more proactive role in stemming an insurgency that the government of Chhattisgarh cannot seem to suppress on its own. Ultimately, greater social justice and enhanced economic opportunity will be necessary to end this long-simmering rebellion. End comment.
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